

Minutes of the meeting of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 18 DECEMBER 2013 at 11.00 am

Present Councillors Bendyshe-Brown, Busby, Dransfield, Edwards, Exon (part), Glover, Gomm, Huxley, Lambert, Mallen, Morris, Reed, Schofield, Vigor-Hedderly, Watson and Webb

Officers: M Jones (Chief Fire Officer), J Thelwell (Chief Operating Officer) G Britten (Director of Law and Governance), D Skinner (Director of Finance and Assets), L Swift (Director of People and Organisational Development) J May (Head of Finance [Deputy Director]), D O'Driscoll (Head of Service Development), M Osborne (Head of Service Delivery), Stuart Gowanlock (Corporate Planning Manager), M Crothers (GM Combined Control Project), Ian Taylor (GM Safety, Improvements and Resilience), A Chart (Health and Safety Manager), C Bell (Service Delivery Manager), T Parkins (Performance and Evaluation and Projects), K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer), F Pearson (Group Manager Communications), and E Andrews (Executive Assistant).

Also Present: A Stansfeld (Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner) and D Carroll (Thames Valley Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner).

3 Members of the Public.

Apologies: Councillor Chilver.

FA18 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 12 June 2013, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

FA19 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that:

- (a) In July he had attended the LGA Conference in Manchester along with the Vice Chairman and Chief Fire Officer.
- (b) Members would be aware that the national dispute between the Fire Brigade's Union and the Government continued and he wished to offer the authority's congratulations to all of the officers and fire crews who had worked so hard to make this area one of the least affected. He knew the subject was on the agenda and would refrain from further discussion.
- (c) He had attended the local government employers' consultation on the matter of firefighter fitness and was disappointed to note the apparent



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lack of representation of the views of fire authorities by the organisation which purports to represent them.

- (d) In conjunction with the Chief Fire Officer, he had sent a response to the government's consultation on the extant matters in dispute and hoped these views would assist with resolution of the on-going strike so as to minimise the risk to our communities and the hardship faced by our fire crews; and that copies of the consultation from the DCLG and his response can be found in the members' library.
- (e) The Thames Valley Firecontrol project continued and a contract had recently been signed with the preferred provider which should hopefully deliver the new control before the end of 2014.
- (f) In October the Chairs and Chiefs of all CFAs were contacted by the DCLG for views on proposals which the DCLG was putting forward in the Deregulation Bill to amend the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to remove certain regulatory burdens; and that he and the Chief Fire Officer responded that the proposals were quite modest and that few regulatory burdens on CFAs are imposed by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004; and that most regulatory burdens were to be found in the patchwork of other legislation that governs local authorities. (One example being the unnecessary cost to publish statutory notices in local newspapers, when publication could be better done on a CFA website). [Copies of the letter from the DCLG and the response can be found in the members' library].
- (g) The Vice Chairman represented the Authority at the Fire Sector Summit on 23 October with Area Manager Osborne.
- (h) The CFO/CEO had approved a 1% cost of living pay award for support staff under local 'green book' related terms and conditions for 2013/14, backdated to the 1 July 2013.
- (i) On Tuesday 22 October, the Authority had hosted a delegation of senior directors and officials from the United Arab Emirates, Ministry of Interior who are responsible for Civil Defence across the UAE which included both the Police and Fire & Rescue Services; and that the feedback received from their senior advisor to the crown prince and Ruler of Abu Dhabi has been extremely positive and they have become very interested in our research work around our resource optimisation model.
- (j) On Friday 25 October 2013, Thirty-seven members of staff who had served a total of nearly 900 years between them had been recognised at an awards ceremony. Many were there in person to receive their medals and certificates from the Lord Lieutenant at the presentation evening at The Oculus in Aylesbury.

Awards were also made to staff with exemplary attendance records, to staff and stations that had shown outstanding support for The Firefighters Charity, and to members of the Service's Urban Search and Rescue team following their success at this year's United Kingdom Rescue Organisation Challenge in Liverpool.

- (k) He had been delighted to welcome everyone to the Authority's Annual Carol Service at St Mary & All Saints Church, Beaconsfield last week

and thanked everyone involved, especially Democratic Services Officer, Katie Nellist; and that the collection raised £338.50 which will be split between St Mary & All Saints Church and The Firefighters Charity.

(l) On the 5 December he and the Vice-Chairman had attended a Fire Commission meeting at the Fire Service College at Moreton-in-Marsh.

(m) The Authority had hosted an Emergency planning day in Milton Keynes on 11 December, and in the spirit of sharing best practice an invitation had been extended to all Fire Authority members and portfolio holders across the South East region; and that members from other authorities commented that this type of collaboration on training should be occurring more often and this Authority will continue to push the South East Authorities in this direction.

FA20

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMITTEES

Executive Committee – 20 November 2013

(a) Members' Scheme of Allowances.

RESOLVED –

That the Scheme for Members' Allowances for 2014/15 be adopted.

(b) Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2014/15 – 2017/18.

(Cllr Exon joined the meeting)

The Chairman advised the Authority that a decision on the precept level for Council Tax did not need to be taken today but would be taken at the Fire Authority meeting on 19 February 2014. This was to be purely an informative discussion.

The Vice-Chairman introduced the report and explained that the three options presented were the updated recommendations from the Executive Committee on 20 November and ranged from a Council Tax freeze, a 2% Council Tax increase and a 1% reduction in Council Tax. These were the options that would need to be taken forward for consideration in February.

The Chief Fire Officer reminded Members that the Fire Authority Precept was very different to a Council Precept as our funding was split between a Government Grant (40%) and Council Tax (60%). Members should be mindful of this when considering the options.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members of the general assumptions that had been made for pay and inflation increases and future years' government grants based on latest information received from CLG.

The Authority was advised that the savings and growth bids had been scrutinised by members of the business transformation board and strategic management board as part of the budget challenge process. A further Member/Officer challenge was scheduled for January 2014.

The Authority was asked to note the proposed summarised version of the Capital Programme. It was reported that current borrowing was £8.2 million against a £28 million reducing budget.

RESOLVED –

That the three Council Tax options – Council Tax freeze, 2% increase or 1% decrease – and their respective affects on the MTFP be noted.

FA21

INDUSTRIAL ACTION, COSTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The Chief Fire Officer updated the Authority on the current position with regard to the dispute between the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) as more strike dates had been announced for the 24 and 31 December 2013 and 3 January 2014.

The Head of Service Development updated the Authority on the costs implications for further action, and advised Members of the outcome of the ballot for 'action short of a strike' which was held on 4 December 2013:

Number of votes cast	-	18,446
Number of individuals answering 'yes'	-	15,758
Number of individuals answering 'no'	-	2,632
Number of spoiled voting papers	-	56

This second ballot also included 'control' staff, (the first ballot excluded control staff and members in Northern Ireland) and our own control staff had communicated to local FBU that they did not wish to take part in any 'action short of a strike'.

The Chairman and members of the Fire Authority wished to record their thanks to the Chief Fire Officer and all staff working during strike periods.

The Authority discussed the recommendation to approve the position in relation to Industrial Action leading to partial performance of duties and to give discretion to the Chief Fire Officer to accept partial performance on a case by case basis, taking into account the associated cost implications in applying this position.

On a vote being taken in respect of the first and fourth resolutions, 15 in favour and 1 (Cllr Lambert) against, it was
RESOLVED:

1. That the position of not accepting partial performance from any member of staff participating in lawful industrial action be adopted.
2. That the costs incurred by the 4-hour strike on 25 September 2013 be noted.
3. That the potential costs of subsequent industrial action be noted.
4. That the position as set out in Appendix A due to the on-going cost of the industrial action be approved.

FA22

THE FIREFIGHTERS CHARITY AND ITS RELEVANCE TO BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY

(Moved forward in the agenda at the direction of the Chairman)

The Chief Fire Officer and the Director of People and Organisational Development declared an interest as both are trustees of the charity.

The Authority received a presentation on the work of The Firefighters Charity by Elizabeth Andrews.

The Authority were advised that the charity was available to all support staff, not only firefighters.

RESOLVED:

1. That the activities of The Firefighters Charity and the staff of Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service in respect of the charity be noted.
2. That continued support for the fund raising efforts be given; and that the Chief Fire Officer be encouraged to give as much support as possible to this worthwhile cause which assists with firefighter rehabilitation and recuperation.

FA23

THAMES VALLEY FIRE CONTROL SERVICE PROGRAMME

The Chief Fire Officer updated Fire Authority Members on key aspects of the Thames Valley Fire Control Service Programme, including slippage of delivery until the last quarter of 2014 and the financial impact of the slippage.

The contract with the service provider Capita for the completion of the mobilisation system had now been signed by Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

The Chief Fire Officer commended the Control staff who continued to work and perform under difficult circumstances. The Authority asked the Chief Fire Officer to also convey their thanks and gratitude to the Control staff.

The Director of People and Organisational Development advised Members that Control staff received regular communication, by face to face meetings, information on the iDrive, individual letters and regular update meetings.

RESOLVED:

1. That the progress to date, including the programme slippage and outline financial impact of the slippage be noted;
2. That the use of the earmarked reserve to fund the retention package be approved;
3. That delegation to the Chief Fire Officer to determine the detailed allowances for the retention package within the total budget of £150k and £255k be approved.

FA24

ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT AND TRENDS

The Authority considered the current position in respect of attendance management and the key improvements that have been made to date to reduce non-attendance caused by sickness absence.

The Director of People and Organisational Development advised Members that the report showed where we were, where we are now, what we did to improve the short to medium term position and although we are not where we want to be yet, what's possible.

The Chief Fire Officer instructed Members that the reduction in absence due to ill health was a good news story; the Chairman reiterated this and congratulated the team for getting improvements.

RESOLVED -

That the Authority's recorded attendance management performance trends, absence reductions to date, and plans for further improvements are noted.

FA25 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY PROGRESS REPORT

The Authority were advised that the report summarised the outcomes of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) Review, which showed there was very little change. It also provided a mid-year progress update on delivering the Authority's equality and diversity priorities, with the emphasis during 2013/14 to fully embed equality and diversity considerations within the day to day activities of the Authority.

RESOLVED –

1. That the outcomes of the Public Sector Equality Duty Review be noted.
2. That the mid-year progress in relation to embedding equality and diversity within the authority be noted.

FA26 PUBLIC CONSULTATION – PRE-IRMP “LISTENING AND ENGAGEMENT” RESEARCH

The Chief Operating Officer advised the Authority that a two stage consultation process had been planned, parts of which had already been implemented, which would embrace the general public, Authority staff and other stakeholders.

The first phase with the public was the initial 'listening and engagement' research, which would explore a number of perceptions, awareness and what really mattered to them.

The second phase was a formal consultation on specific proposals arising out of the IRMP development process, where there would be scope to re-recruit the same participants again.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

FA27 ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT 2012/13

The Authority considered the annual health and safety report which detailed performance from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 and, in so doing, recognised that the Service was performing well and was one of the top performing authorities when it came to the health and safety of its staff.

The Chief Operating Officer advised the Authority this was another good news story, essential to supporting our services and there was a genuine commitment which is embedded across the service.

The Health and Safety Manager gave Members a detailed updated on activities throughout the service. With new staff taking over the Health and Safety department in February 2013, it was decided not to pursue an award or accreditation this year to allow them to settle in to their new roles. However, in 2012 Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service were awarded the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Gold award, at its first attempt, in recognition of its commitment to accident and ill health prevention in the workplace.

RESOLVED:

That the continued good performance of Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service in this vital area of work be noted.

FA28

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Authority noted that the next meeting of the Fire Authority is to be held on Wednesday 19 February 2014 at 11.00am.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 1.30 PM